DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 116 476 FL 007 354

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| TITLE | English as a Second Language in Kindergarten--Orientation and Scheduling. Preschool Education Series, No. 1. Indochinese Refugee Education Guides. |
| INSTITUTION | Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C. |
| PUB DATE | 75 |
| NOTE | 4p.; In part extracted from "Teaching English as a Second Language in the Kindergarten," by Muriel Saville-Troike; For related documents, see FL 007 355-357 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage |
| DESCRIPTORS | Cambodian; Class Activities; Class Organization; Classroom Techniques; *English (Second Language); *Indochinese; Interference (Language Learning); *Kindergarten; *Language Instruction; Non English Speaking; Preschool Education; Refugees; Scheduling; Second Language Learning; *Teaching Guides; Teaching Methods; Vietnamese |

ABSTRACT

This guide is addressed to teachers and/or school administrators who may have non-English-speaking Vietnamese and Cambodian children in their classrooms. The guide describes certain interference problems involved in learning a second language, as well as a number of psychological and cultural factors affecting the learning process. A suggested schedule and organization of instruction and specific activities and techniques for teaching English as a second language at the kindergarten level are also presented. (TL)

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# Indochinese Refugee Education Guides

1.

**PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SERIES: English as a Second Language in Kindergarten -- Orientation and Scheduling**

This year, many of America's teachers will be facing a problem which, while not unique in the history of American schools, may be very unique to the individual teacher: the influx of thousands of non-English-speaking children into our classrooms. In addition to other problems which Vietnamese and Cambodian children will face, perhaps the most immediate will be the language difficulty. In order to ease the difficulties which the "language barrier" may present to both teachers and pupils, we have prepared this short introduction to teaching English as a foreign language.

While the teacher's own classroom experience, training, and sensitivity will go a long way toward easing the transition of his pupils to the American education system, we feel that some extra information, particularly in the areas of second language teaching and cross-cultural attitudes, will be useful. This short paper, then, is an extract from Muriel Saville-Troike's manuscript TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE KINDERGARTEN. For Dr. Saville-Troike's generosity in sharing her work, we are extremely grateful.

There is an apparent high correlation between linguistic divergence from standard English and low achievement in our schools which makes oral language development assume a high priority in curriculum planning and preparation. The recognition of the nature of language differences is important in education because any approach which stigmatizes a child's speech (or that of his family) will probably humiliate him and certainly create an environment which is not conducive to learning. In addition, the child's own language may affect the nature of the problems he will have in learning a second language, so that teaching materials may have to be adjusted accordingly.

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As a child learns to talk, the linguistic habits involved in speaking and hearing become more and more firmly fixed. Children learn to hear all sounds in terms of their particular language's sound system. "Foreign" sounds are not heard as such, but rather, are "translated" automatically and unconsciously, into the native sound system. For example, an American child learning French, literally cannot hear the differences among the vowels in vous, tu and veux, distinctions clear to a native speaker of French. Instead, the American child pronounces all these sounds as he pronounces the vowel in the word "glue". Further, this same sort of problem occurs with respect to grammar and vocabulary. These problems of perception and use of a second language due to native language habits are called linguistic interference.

Additionally, cultural factors should be borne in mind when planning a language teaching program:

1. The language-loyalty sentiments of the pupil's family.
2. The acculturation pressures being applied to the pupil.
3. The dominant or more prestigious status of English.
4. His surrounding socio-economic conditions.

5. His feelings of social identity.
6. A different learning style from one for which the teacher is prepared.

We need to perceive and understand differences in values and customs as well as in the languages of our students if we are to teach English effectively.

SCHEDULE AND ORGANIZATION: A period for direct instruction of English should occupy between twenty and thirty minutes of the school day and be spaced between periods of information activity. The rate of instruction should remain flexible and no definite limits set as to what linguistic structures must be covered in every classroom each day. The sequence of instruction, however, is far less flexible. Language learning is cumulative; new structures build on what has already been learned. Also, easier structures should be presented first. This insures that several new features are not introduced to the pupils on the same day, or at the same time.

Varied language activities can accompany other experiences. Objects brought into the classroom should have verbal labels. Children should be encouraged to use these labels in reference to the object instead of pointing. These objects which the children experience should provide much of the vocabulary content for direct language instruction. Because the objects are in the room, the children will want to know what they are and will have the opportunity to use the words over and over.

During free time, language use can be encouraged by the teacher. He should circulate quietly among the children, saying, "Tell me about what you're doing" and listening. The child's verbalizations may not be in standard English, but this is not the place to make corrections; any and all language should be encouraged at this time. Language use in the classroom may also be stimulated by the use of telephones (play or battery-operated) and/or tape recorders. However, insure that the child understands how to use the equipment and, if initially he seems very reluctant to play with the equipment, don't insist. Various props -- hats, or puppets, etc. -- may stimulate language in dramatic play.

Every child learns a great deal of his language from his peer group. A child learns the subtle nuances of meanings of words by trial and error testing against other members of his group in actual communication. By encouraging inter-pupil communication as much as possible we will increase the child's opportunity both to practice what he has learned and also to learn important new things.

While children from various language backgrounds can be placed in the same classroom successfully, we should not assume that they must all have the same educational experience. Recognizing the individual needs of the students, and utilizing small group and individual instruction techniques will maximize the amount of time you spend with your pupils. If, for instance, a kindergarten class contains some Vietnamese children who speak Vietnamese but little or no English, brief periods each day should be devoted to teaching basic English sentence patterns and vocabulary to just the Vietnamese children. These children will learn English far more efficiently if there is opportunity throughout the rest of the day for them to participate in varied activities in the room and on the play-field with English-speaking classmates.

Grouping young children for any areas of instruction requires careful preparation and organization. The following procedure has proved effective at the kindergarten level even when there is no aide or other adult assisting the teacher in the classroom:

a. Give specific directions to the entire class at the beginning of the independent activity period.

b. Have all materials they are to work with prepared in advance.

c. Keep the small group with you for instruction a maximum of 10 minutes to begin with.

d. Do not help other children with puzzles or accept other interruptions from them for that short period of time.

e. Signal the children in some way when they may change activities and when you are again available to them (move from the group, dismiss the group, ring a bell, etc.).

f. The rest of the class may be working on coloring, clay, pegs, puzzles or other quiet activities.

g. Omit paint, blocks, doll corner, and other activities which require close supervision or a lot of noise while you are working with a small group.